

The Role of Transition Assistance: *The Case of Nigeria*

EVALUATION BRIEF NUMBER 4

Summary

Responding to the opportunity to foster and support Nigeria's return to democratic rule, USAID mobilized its Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) to launch a country program that included activities related to civilian-military relations, conflict management, and civil society. The trigger was moderate military leader Atiku Abubakar's holding of elections in late 1998 and early 1999. OTI first established a field office in Lagos, followed in early 1999 by others in Abuja (the capital), Ibadan, and Port Harcourt.

An assessment by USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) found that the decision to initiate an OTI program in Nigeria generally followed OTI's established guidelines. The quality and comprehensiveness of the initial planning effort stood out, but the quality of planning declined as implementation proceeded.

CDIE's review also found that OTI's transition assistance was successfully initiated, but that the level and quality of interaction and communication between OTI and other USAID offices deteriorated, hindering program coordination and integration. The CDIE team recommended that USAID develop clear guidance to address the structural and line-of-authority issues that complicate program implementation, monitoring, and results reporting.

The CDIE evaluators concluded that OTI assistance played an important role in Nigeria by complementing other USAID assistance with timely, relevant, and innovative activities. The good governance training provided a timely and useful foundation for newly elected officials assuming leadership roles. The civilian-military relations initiative set the framework for a continued dialogue and actions for strengthening civilian oversight. The extensive conflict management activity showed promising results in addressing conflict at the local level in a society plagued by endemic violence. However, the team also found that OTI's short-term and one-time events need to be replicated or followed up to yield lasting results. The team believes this followup is particularly important to the U.S. Government's conflict management strategy to reduce potential threats to Nigeria's fragile democracy. ■

KEY IDEAS

- OTI assistance can play an important role in countries in transition. However, follow-on assistance is often necessary to achieve lasting results.
- The conflict management initiative showed promising initial results.
- Coordination and communication between OTI and other mission entities are essential.
- Early planning helps make initiative handoff efficient and effective.
- The SWIFT contract is useful for implementing transition activities.



The Case of Nigeria

Background

After the sudden death in 1998 of military dictator Sani Abacha, military leader Atiku Abubakar assumed power and scheduled elections. Elections were held in December 1998 and January 1999 for local government and state representatives. Presidential elections followed in February 1999.

Taking advantage of the opportunity to support Nigeria's return to democratic rule, OTI collaborated with other USAID offices and the State Department in assessing prospects for a program in Nigeria. In March 1999, OTI initiated the program, implementing activities in the areas of conflict management, democracy/governance, and energy policy.

The decision to engage was marked by an extraordinary degree of collaboration and support, both within USAID and between USAID and the State Department. The decision turned on the importance of Nigeria to U.S. national interests.

In 2000, CDIE began an evaluation of the general role of transition assistance and specifically of OTI's role and activities. Transition assistance, as used here, refers to the OTI-administered programs providing flexible, short-term responses to advance peaceful, democratic change. OTI transition assistance is usually provided during a postcrisis period when a country is vulnerable to renewed conflict or instability.

This *Evaluation Brief* summarizes the findings and lessons learned from the country study of transition assistance in Nigeria, based on field research conducted in November 2000. The evaluators reviewed documents, visited four sites in Nigeria, and interviewed representatives of USAID

(including OTI), the U.S. embassy, the Department of Defense, Nigerian grantees, and other donors.

The CDIE study 1) sought to determine if the decision to initiate a transition program was made in a transparent fashion and considered appropriate criteria, 2) analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the planning process, 3) assessed program implementation, 4) discussed program duration and handoff issues, and 5) determined whether the transition activities achieved their objectives effectively.

Deciding to Engage

OTI's work in Nigeria grew out of USAID's Nigeria task force, formed in 1998 to coordinate USAID planning, and a National Security Council-led interagency working group (IAWG) that coordinated all U.S. assistance to Nigeria. In August 1998, the task force assessed prospects for the country's transition to democracy and developed activity proposals.

The decision to engage was marked by an extraordinary degree of collaboration and support, both within USAID and between USAID and the State Department. The decision turned on the importance of Nigeria to U.S. national interests—Nigeria is one of four countries where promoting democracy is a U.S. national priority—and the “catalytic event” of new elections.

The evaluators concluded that the decision to initiate an OTI program in Nigeria generally met OTI engagement guidelines established to allocate scarce transition resources for furthering priority democracy and stability objectives. Predictably, projecting a successful outcome—one of the key guidelines—was difficult because of Nigeria's history of unsuccessful attempts at democratic rule. OTI did not formally apply or document the extent to which the decision to engage met the guidelines.

Planning Transition Assistance

Planning activities shifted to a broader, interagency context after the February 1999 elections. In support of USAID's democracy/governance

strategic objective, a June 1999 IAWG report suggested OTI be involved in civilian-military relations and governance, conflict management, and anticorruption efforts. The interagency planning process demonstrated a high degree of collaboration, resulting in a close fit of initial plans.

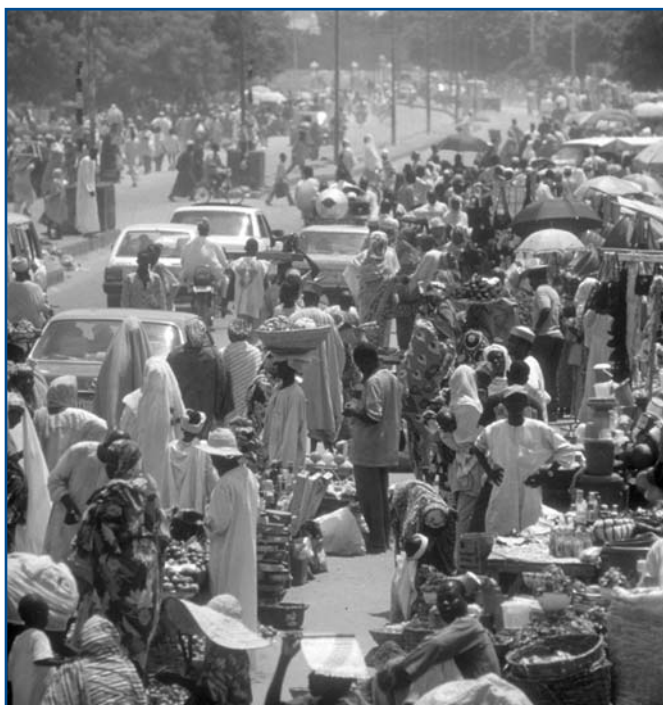
The quality and comprehensiveness of the USAID and interagency early planning effort for Nigeria stood out among four programs reviewed by CDIE. However, subsequent planning and monitoring revealed some confusion on the relationship of OTI's goals and objectives to those of the overall USAID country transition strategy. As OTI further developed its program, planning became diffuse, with multiple objectives less focused on the country transition strategy objectives. Non-OTI mission staff were unable to report on all OTI efforts within the country strategy context. Thus, while OTI and mission program planning was highly collaborative initially, the quality of planning and program integration declined over time.

Implementing Activities

OTI initiated its program in Nigeria quickly, establishing regional offices within a few months to provide nearly nationwide support to local groups. The regional offices extended program reach and strengthened activity management capacity. The first initiative—training for 10,300 elected officials—was implemented in early 1999. The Support Which Implements Fast Transitions (SWIFT) contractor sent a startup team to Nigeria in early 1999 to set up logistics and support implementation.

Following the June 1999 IAWG assessment, OTI implemented activities in the following areas:

- *Conflict management.* OTI assisted local groups and civil society organizations aiding conflict-prone communities.
- *Democracy/governance.* The key areas included civilian-military relations, where OTI-funded experts and their civilian and military Nigerian counterparts took the essential first steps toward restructuring the military's role to one



Africa's most populous country is important to U.S. interests. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) launched a nationwide program in Nigeria to foster return to democratic rule.

appropriate to a democratic society. OTI assisted private print media, trained journalists in reporting techniques to improve overall journalistic quality, and developed a program to improve police performance.

- *Energy.* OTI-financed consultants advised USAID/Nigeria and Nigerian partners on energy policy options and a privatization plan, based on a preliminary assessment of the Nigeria Electric Power Authority.

Through November 2000, OTI/Nigeria committed \$11.4 million for 197 grants, including some grants for overall logistics and support. Although OTI's small grants are management-intensive, they encouraged experimentation; provided an ability to support local and emerging organizations, especially those with weak management capacity; and resulted in more focused activities at the local level.

CDIE evaluators concluded that OTI played an important role in accelerating the U.S. Government transition response. However, as implementation proceeded, the level and quality of

interaction between OTI and other USAID offices declined. Inadequate communication between OTI and others in the mission also impeded program coordination and the development of a fuller understanding of the OTI program by other mission staff. Factors contributing to this situation included the OTI/Nigeria director's move to quarters separate from the USAID mission and the separate handling of administrative support. Disagreement between OTI and the mission executive officer on operations and procurement further exacerbated relationships. Most importantly, the parallel structures and authority relationships for OTI and other mission programs presented a particular challenge to coordinating USAID programs at the country level and within the country strategic context.

Ineffective communication and coordination between OTI and other mission programs slowed and complicated the planning for handoff.

Handing Off Transition Activities

The OTI program in Nigeria was expected to end in September 2001—a duration of nearly two and one-half years, close to the three-year median for OTI programs. USAID/Nigeria and OTI anticipated a timely phaseout. Initial training for officials, civilian-military relations, and electric power activities were completed or handed off on schedule. But ineffective communication and coordination between OTI and other mission programs slowed and complicated the planning for handoff of other activities. By early November 2000, both OTI and other mission staff were beginning to address handoff issues.

CDIE evaluators concluded that the planned duration of the OTI program in Nigeria appeared appropriate. The team noted, however, that planning had to move forward quickly if programs meriting continuation were to be handed off effectively by September 2001.

Achieving Objectives

The team examined OTI/Nigeria program achievements in the key areas of civilian-military relations, conflict management, and civil society/media support. According to an independent assessment, the OTI training program for elected officials contributed to an open leadership approach, strengthened participation, and encouraged transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the electorate's needs.

Civilian-Military Relations

The legacy of military rule is one of the greatest threats to rebuilding Nigerian democracy. OTI's development of an action plan for a civilian-military relations program was a crucial intermediate step to promoting broad understanding within Nigeria of the role of the military in a democracy. A military sensitive to its role in a democracy is clearly central to U.S. foreign policy interests in Nigeria. OTI's contribution to overall U.S. objectives in initiating the civilian-military relations effort was significant and catalytic. The OTI-developed plan encompassed a program involving the military establishment and civilian branches of government—notably the National Assembly. OTI also supported the preparation of public service announcements that informed the public on the role of the military in a democracy. CDIE evaluators confirmed that the initiative stimulated the transfer of governance from military to civilian rule—clearly the right solution, at the right time, to the problems posed by a series of autocratic military regimes and a civilian-military cadre inexperienced in dealing with a subordinate military.

CDIE evaluators also examined how the initial plan was being jointly implemented by the U.S. Department of Defense and the Nigerian government. Although too early to measure the results, they suggested the need to reassess the fundamental assumption of the plan—that the military was ready for reform—and the contractor's performance. The evaluators also stressed that greater coherence and coordination between U.S. programs would strengthen Nigeria's commitment to the program and that tools used might include

the interactive, participatory workshop approach that showed promising results in addressing conflict management issues.

Conflict Management

Emanating from ethnic differences or religious affiliation, conflict is common in Nigerian society. Violence may be large scale, such as the religious rioting in the north, or local, such as the ethnic conflicts in the southeast Delta region. To address conflict, OTI initiated an activity at the grassroots level, providing grants to local organizations to hold workshops for groups with high potential for conflict and to train trainers in conflict mitigation. Training seminars were held in six Nigerian geopolitical zones. The 200 Nigerian trainers who were trained are now part of a national network of conflict mitigation facilitators.

OTI's participatory workshop approach produced widespread and significant initial results. Perhaps the most important contribution was helping local organizations build capacity to address local and regional conflicts. OTI's activities changed



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attitudes toward conflict, helped resolve specific conflicts, prevented or reduced violent conflict, and generated interest in addressing conflict more systematically nationwide. The results included the major, highly visible conflict resolution effort

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in which OTI-sponsored and -trained mediators were able to stabilize the long-standing Ife-Modakeke fighting that presidential, state, and local government interventions had failed to quell in March 2000. Another result was the success in changing police attitudes toward dealing with conflict in Oke Ogun: a participating police commander was so enthusiastic he subsequently moved to initiate conflict resolution training for police nationwide. The OTI initiative's appeal was not limited to a particular area; positive results were demonstrated in several geographic areas. The growing interest in effective conflict management in Nigeria is a particularly positive outcome of the OTI initiative.

However, some grantees and USAID staff noted that the OTI effort was too often a "one-shot" approach that covered only limited areas of Nigeria's conflict environment. They also noted the lack of follow-on activity or much effort to replicate the success on a larger scale.¹ Both OTI and the longer term mission program staff recognized the need for greater collaboration to ensure appropriate program continuation after OTI departed.

Conflict management is an important and appropriate program in Nigeria, underlined by the

¹ OTI staff reviewing the report disagreed with this conclusion and maintained that their approach is to experiment with a variety of approaches and organizations, ultimately selecting those that are most promising. The issue here is not whether experimentation is valuable but whether, without followup and closer integration with long-term USAID efforts, these short-term investments will have lasting impact in the country or realize the full potential of the investment.

painful reminder that significant conflict, left unresolved, jeopardizes the success of Nigeria's extremely fragile democracy. Clearly, systematic followup and replication are needed for achieving greater impact and developing sustainable capacity in conflict management. Participants in the conflict management and resolution process uniformly stressed the need to maintain momentum. Such followup, however, is labor intensive and will likely require an implementing modality like that of the SWIFT contract.

Civil Society/Media Support

OTI's several civil society initiatives led to the formation of a national nongovernmental organization network for dealing with general constituency issues, such as local democratic action, conflict management, and human rights.

OTI also worked with civil society groups on using media for airing public issues. OTI activities helped develop capacity in print media organizations, trained journalists in quality reporting, and supported internet sites for journalists. OTI also supported Voice of America programs on conflict topics in Nigeria.

The CDIE evaluators found that OTI's pilot television series on corruption generated public and corporate interest and potential funding for follow-on efforts. The success of this program stimulated ideas for using television and radio to address other public issues. ■



OTI helped provide training, technical assistance, and other support for local Nigerian journalists.

Lessons Learned and Recommendation

1 OTI assistance can play an important role in countries in transition. However, follow-on assistance is often necessary to achieve lasting results.

OTI's activities can play an important role in transition countries, complementing USAID's longer term country programs. However, OTI's activities are often short-term or one-time events that need to be replicated or extended to achieve lasting results. OTI's assistance in Nigeria included innovative, timely, and relevant activities. But OTI's approach features "experiments" that produce a range of results. Donor transition investments—OTI's in particular—are validated and sustained only to the extent that there is timely and appropriate followup. Longer term support for promising activities is required to achieve fuller and sustainable impact.

Continuing the conflict management effort is central to USAID's and the U.S. Government's strategy to reduce potential threats to Nigeria's fragile democracy. Workshop effectiveness is optimized when followup workshops deepen learning. Peace mediation committees and other activities that flow from workshops may need nurturing, supplementary funding, and course corrections before they can be reliably placed on autopilot. Sustaining OTI's contribution requires a follow-on, repetitive approach with the same groups and expanded programs for others.

Followup support is also needed to continue OTI's promising pilot media initiatives, such as the anticorruption television series. The viability of the internet press centers is likely to be jeopardized if USAID or other donors do not continue funding and technical assistance after OTI departs.

2 The conflict management initiative showed promising initial results.

OTI's interactive, participatory workshop training

for conflict management showed a wide range of impacts in Nigeria, confirming the approach's effectiveness. Moreover, OTI achieved its highly visible success with relatively modest financial outlays. Conflict management training is particularly important in Nigeria because the country is permeated by conflict. If left unchecked, such conflict constitutes the greatest threat to building an effective democracy. Conflict management programs can help reduce conflicts, even those engendered by the obligatory checks and balances of the democratic process. Participatory workshop training that OTI used to address conflict management, may also be applicable to other areas, such as developing a national or defense strategy, engaging military and legislative leaders on civilian-military relations issues, professionalizing the military on human rights and ethics, and building teamwork for good governance at state and local levels.

Conflict management programs can help reduce conflicts, even those engendered by the obligatory checks and balances of the democratic process.

Dissemination of lessons learned on managing and resolving conflict could extend the impact of this initial effort throughout Nigeria. For example, lessons could be shared with Nigerian state and local governments, as well as other donors, UN agencies, and nongovernmental organizations.

3 Coordination and communication between OTI and other mission entities are essential. OTI and other mission entities must coordinate and communicate effectively to develop mutual understanding, build ownership of OTI initiatives, and integrate all USAID efforts. The high level of collaboration between OTI and other USAID entities that characterized the decisionmaking and initial program planning stages became less effective as implementation proceeded. Coordination and communication were hindered by the relocation of OTI outside the mission, the disagreement between



Senator Florence Ita Giwa greets Mrs. Onikepo Oshodi and Mr. A. Gudiga (regional counterpart, OTI Abuja). OTI funded training in constituency building, transparency, legislative processes, and conflict management for more than 10,000 elected officials in Nigeria.

OTI and the mission executive officer on operations and procurement issues, and the structural and authority relationships dividing OTI and other mission operations.

Coordinating OTI and other mission programs is important for effective program integration and handoff. Less than optimal coordination and communication during the implementation of the conflict management activity hindered the development of program synergy. Subsequent to the evaluation, both offices took major steps to improve communication and better integrate the programs in preparation for OTI's departure. Improved program coordination and integration facilitated handing off conflict management activities.

4 Early planning helps makes handoff efficient and effective.

Early planning for handoff—preferably during design but no later than the initial year—is important for ensuring that the mission (or others) can continue successful initiatives to achieve sustainable impact, thus taking full advantage of OTI's short-term program. Planning for handoff was an integral part of some activity designs, including those relating to civilian-military relations and energy, where OTI was responsible for the first phase. However, planning for handoff of the conflict management and media activities was delayed.

5 The SWIFT contract is useful for implementing transition activities.

OTI effectively used the SWIFT indefinite quantity contract in Nigeria to implement its short-term, quick-response activities, including those with emerging organizations that had limited institutional capacity. The contract proved effective for quick in-country startup, rapid procurement, and flexible programming. That missions can also use the SWIFT mechanism to continue OTI transition initiatives is not well known. USAID/Nigeria could benefit from picking up selected OTI programs before OTI departs, perhaps consolidating and expanding promising initiatives and using the SWIFT mechanism where appropriate.

Recommendation

1 Provide guidance to deal with structural and authority issues.

For maximum effectiveness, USAID needs to develop clear guidance to address the issues stemming from structural and line-of-authority differences between OTI and other mission elements. The guidance could emphasize how important it is for OTI to

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become an integral part of mission operations and encourage unified program planning, implementation, and results reporting. If such guidance came from a high level within the Agency, it would more likely encourage compliance. In Kosovo, OTI reported to the USAID mission director. More recently, OTI and some missions have developed memoranda of understanding that set out roles and program responsibilities. These are constructive approaches to improving coordination. ■

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